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UNCLAS SANTO DOMINGO 004725

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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC - REGIONAL PROTESTS PRECEDED BY TWO SHOOTING DEATHS

1. On October 19 protests in central streets shut portions of the major provincial city of Santiago and surrounding areas. Demonstrators demanded changes in the government,s economic policies and price reductions on basic food products, gas, and electricity. The strike stopped many of the public transport cars and buses. Organizers Victor Breton of the Extended Front for the People (FALPO), Juan Marte of the National Transport Confederation (CONATRA), and the Father Rogelio Cruz of Organization of Populist Groups had called for a 24-hour strike. Clashes in the streets left several persons injured. Two persons were shot dead in the early hours of the morning before the strike actually started; one was an assistant to PLD congressman Juan Serulle. A total of 57 organizations backed the work stoppage.

2. Populist leaders said the effort had achieved 90 percent participation in 14 provinces of Cibao. Puerta Plata, Bonao, La Vega, Saman, and Nagua were not affected. Various institutions suspended classes, including Nordestana Catholic University, the Northeast Regional University (Curne), and all the state and private schools in the Northern region suspended classes. One news daily reported 7 serious injuries and over 100 arrests. The southwestern city of Barahona was affected by street protests as well; two onlookers were injured by stray bullets.

3. There have been no complaints concerning the actions of the security forces. Police in Santiago are reported to be holding 45 persons under arrest. Presidential press spokesman Roberto Nunez called the demonstrations insignificant: "They said they would shut down 14 provinces and failed even to affect two." He denounced "hooded individuals using rifles."

4. The Attorney General,s office and the police are investigating the case. Leaders of the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) blamed strike organizers. PLD leader Julio Cesar Valentin, said he had information that those responsible were from FALPO and the PRD. Santiago governor Jose Izquierdo blamed FALPO and the PRD. FALPO spokesperson Victor Breton said the deaths resulted from an assault carried out by two unknown individuals; strike organizers emphatically offered to turn themselves into the district attorney for questioning, to prove their innocence. Secretary of Interior and Police Franklin Almeida said that

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there are "political groups interested in creating problems" behind the violent incidents.

5. FALPO has a history of protest activity, including two country-wide work stoppages in the last year of the Mejia administration. It has virtually no presence in the capital, Santo Domingo. Since June the group has organized several marches, protests and work stoppages in the central Cibao region. On October 13, FALPO led a march of more than 100 persons in Santiago demanding more investment in public infrastructure.

BRINEMAN